

GCTF Sahel Working Group
Opening Remarks by Ambassador Daniel Benjamin, on behalf of the Co-Chairs of the Global Counterterrorism Forum

On behalf of my Turkish Co-Chair, I want to thank Minister Messahel for his opening remarks. We welcome the leadership role that Algeria continues to play in the region's effort to address the terrorist threat and are delighted that Algeria and Canada have agreed to co-chair the GCTF's Sahel Regional Capacity-Building Group.

As we will discuss in the next session – and I am very interested to hear the views of countries from the region – the terrorist threat has become more complex with some of the changes taking place in the region, particularly next door in Libya. As a result, the need to build the partnerships, cooperation, and capacity to confront the challenges in this region is more urgent than ever. Under the guidance of our Algerian and Canadian co-chairs, we are confident that this working group will further our collective efforts to address them.

Since this is the first GCTF meeting for some delegations in this room, I thought it would be useful to provide some general background on the Forum. Officially launched by U.S. Secretary of State Clinton and Turkish Foreign Minister Davutoglu on September 22nd in New York, it is a new, informal, multilateral counterterrorism platform that will focus on identifying critical civilian counterterrorism needs, mobilizing the necessary expertise and resources to address such needs and enhance global cooperation. It provides a needed venue for national counterterrorism officials and practitioners to meet with their counterparts from key countries in different regions to share counterterrorism experiences, expertise, strategies, capacity needs, and capacity-building programs.

The GCTF will prioritize civilian capacity building in areas such as rule of law, border management, and countering violent extremism. The GCTF will also provide a unique platform for senior counterterrorism policymakers and experts from key partners in different regions to share insights and best practices. In short, the GCTF will take a more strategic approach to civilian counterterrorism efforts and help us increase the number of countries capable – both technically and in terms of capacity and determination – of dealing with the terrorist challenge.

As the initial Co-Chairs of the GCTF, Turkey and the U.S. are quite pleased with the September launch event which demonstrated both the strong political support from so many countries for the Forum and its action-oriented focus. As Secretary

Clinton said, the GCTF is intended to be a catalyst for action rather than another debating society.

To that end, our Ministers are delighted with the concrete deliverables that were announced at the launch. First, the adoption of the Cairo Declaration on Counterterrorism and the Rule of Law and the announcement of a major rule of law capacity-building program -- now totaling some \$100 million -- focused, in particular, on countries transitioning away from emergency law. Second, the announcement by the United Arab Emirates of its intention to support and host an international center of excellence on countering violent extremism, the first-ever CVE-focused multilateral training, dialogue, and research center.

Now that the platform exists, most of the GCTF's work will take place in its five expert-driven working groups: thematic ones focused on 1) criminal justice and the rule of law; and 2) countering violent extremism; and regional capacity-building groups focused on 1) The Horn of Africa Region; 2) Southeast Asia; and of course, 3) the Sahel.

Two week ago, the United States had the honor to host the first working group meeting, the launch of the Criminal Justice/Rule of Law Working Group, which brought senior counterterrorism prosecutors and other criminal justice officials together from all 30 GCTF members to begin developing a compendium of good practices on effective counterterrorism practice in the criminal justice system. Once these practices are finalized, the group will turn much of its attention to providing or facilitating the training, advising and other technical assistance to promote their implementation in interested countries. This is the sort of results-oriented approach we hope all of the GCTF's working groups will follow. With Algeria and Canada at the helm, we are confident that the Sahel Working Group will meet this challenge.

Although currently comprised of 30 members, the GCTF is committed to involving relevant non-GCTF stakeholders in its activities. With respect to the GCTF's three regional capacity-building groups, GCTF members have agreed on the need to ensure the full participation of key local governments and relevant regional and subregional bodies from the very start of their work. This is critical for building the local ownership and legitimacy in the region that are so important for ensuring the success of the groups. Thus, we are particularly pleased to see so many Sahelian countries and organizations working in the region represented at this opening meeting of the working group and we look forward to their active participation in all aspects of this group.

Through this working group we hope to get a clearer sense of the capacity-building challenges and priorities in the region and mobilize the expertise, resources, and political will to address them. In addition, we think this group can play a catalytic role with respect to the increasing number of counterterrorism-related activities in the region. By providing a forum where recommendations and conclusions from these initiatives can be presented to a group that includes the key regional stakeholders as well as external partners, we believe the working group will help bring greater coherence to and maximize the impact of these efforts.

At this and in all GCTF meetings we must be mindful that we will not always agree on every issue, but that those gathered here do agree that there are urgent needs and challenges that aren't being addressed and that each country or organization here today has unique expertise to contribute. We know that what works in one country may not work in another. But we can learn a lot from one another as we work together to build the cooperation and capacity to confront the terrorist threat in the region.

In conclusion, Co-Chairs of the Global Counterterrorism Forum applaud Algeria's and Canada's willingness to lead this group, are looking forward to a productive inaugural meeting, and stand ready to help ensure the long-term success of this and the other GCTF working groups.